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SHOPTON, HOME OF THE SWIFTS

By John T. Dizer, Jr.



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SHOPTON, HOME OF THE SWIFTS

By John T. Dizer, Jr.

The Brungarians know where Shopton is. Their agents have spent countless hours there in nefarious plotting against the Swifts. Ivan Barsky had no trouble finding Shopton. Neither did Happy Harry alias Jim Burke, nor the agents from Verano. The scientists from Memispak and the top brass in the Army know how to reach Shopton. Their friends in outer space are able to land projectiles on the very grounds of the Swift Airfield. It sometimes seems that every major malefactor of the century has either visited Shopton or sent agents there.

Why then is it that letters addressed to the Swift Construction Company in Shopton, or to its subsidiary the T. Swift Boat and Engine Works, are returned marked "Address Unknown." And why is Shopton not shown on any known map of New York State? It seems obvious to this observer that high government officials are taking all possible precautions for the security of the Swift companies. This would be highly desirable if it served a real purpose. We are all familiar with the contributions of the Swifts including Barton, Thomas and Thomas Jr. to national security and welcome reasonable regulations. Since, however, both national and international criminals are thoroughly familiar with the location of the Swift companies in Shopton it seems the height of bureaucratic stupidity to pretend that Shopton does not exist.

Of course Shopton exists. Not only is this obvious from the actual developments of the Swifts, fantastic though they may seem to the uninitiated, but Mr. Appleton and his son

give a great many clues to the location in their series of historical reports of the Swift enterprises. The purpose of this paper is to sift the clues, conflicting and confusing as they sometimes appear to be, and present to their admiring public the true location of Shopton, home of the fabulous Swifts.

The Mistery Appleton have been recording the Swift history only since 1910 although the name is an old and honored one. An uncle of Thomas and brother of Barton was immortalized by Mr. Edward Stratemeyer in "Shorthand Tom, The Reporter." This Tom, for whom the more famous Tom was named, was a noted editor on a New York newspaper. Benjamin Swift an uncle of both the senior Tom and Barton, was noted as a wealthy explorer and it is on record that he died in Africa in the 1890's leaving his wealth to his nephew Tom.

Mr. Arthur Winfield in "The Schooldays of Fred Harley" mentions a Billy Swift who was matriculated at Parker Academy, Maplewood Center, New York. This particular youth appears to have been a bit of a cad and an unsufferable snob and it is perhaps fortunate that there is no proven connection with the Shopton Swifts. It is believed that the Swift family was related through the maternal side to both the Porter and Rover families, well known in central New York. It is interesting to note, in passing, that Mr. Stratemeyer, Mr. Winfield and the elder Mr. Appleton were extremely good friends and that both Mr. Stratemeyer and Mr. Winfield corresponded with Mr. Appleton on the Swift epics.

At any rate the Swifts have been

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established in Shopton for many years. Mr. Appleton notes, "Shopton, the suburb of the town where Tom lived, was named so because of the many shops that had been erected by the industry of the young inventor and his father.(1) It is perhaps significant that details are more plentiful in the earlier books than in the more recent ones. As the importance of the Swifts has increased more and more emphasis has been placed on preserving their privacy. In **Tom Swift and His Motor-Cycle** there was no question.

"Mr. Swift and his son lived in a handsome house on the outskirts of the village of Shopton, New York State. The village was near a large body of water which I shall call Lake Carlopa . . ." (2)

In **Tom Swift And His Sonic Boom** Trap written 55 years later, the location was not specified but even here could still be determined, at least roughly.

Leaving Shopton, "In a few minutes the sleek silver sky giant roared upward westward toward the Great Lakes . . . Twenty minutes later the supersonic jet was swooping down toward Detroit's Metropolitan Airport." (3)

A detailed examination of the 36 books comprising the canon has produced so much information that only the most important clues can be considered in this paper. The research was based on the following items:

1. Distances and directions specifically given
2. Identifying characteristics of cities, lakes and general terrain
3. Inferences drawn from known times and speeds between Shopton and related points
4. Miscellaneous references from which reasonable inferences could be drawn.

In preparation for the study, several large maps and atlases were obtained as well as railroad time tables of 40 years ago covering all known railroads in New York State. The obvious references were first plotted by drawing arcs with minimum and maximum values from a known

starting point. As reasonable inferences were drawn, additional arcs were plotted. Eventually a pattern began to emerge.

Early in the study a startling suggestion presented itself. The evidence became so strong that the suggestion became a hypothesis and the accumulated data was tested against it. The thought was this. Shopton was actually Hammondsport, New York on Keuka Lake. The reasoning was as follows: Hammondsport was the home of Glenn Curtiss, famous inventor, aviator and manufacturer. Tom Swift was the boyhood hero whose career Curtiss attempted to follow. The early careers of Curtiss and Swift were just too identical to be a coincidence. Both were ardent bicyclists who moved on to motorcycles. Both improved on existing motorcycles and went into business manufacturing them. Curtiss invented the motor which powered the Baldwin dirigible and Swift collaborated on the "Red Cloud." (4) Swift planned and built the "Hummingbird" in 3 months and won the Eagle Park Air Meet. Curtiss built the "Golden Flyer" which won the first International Air Meet at Rheims, France in about a month. (5) Anything that Swift did Curtiss tried also. So closely did he follow Tom Swift's ideas that he must have had ready access to the Swift Construction Company. The suggestion even presented itself that Curtiss was the model for Andy Foger, but both his reputation and successful inventions, independent of Tom Swift, indicate that this is doubtful. Looking again at the canon in light of these truly remarkable coincidences it seems that many of the Appleton comments were obviously referring to Hammondsport.

Let us now turn to the actual sources. At one point Mr. Damon commented that it took the train over 5 hours to go from Shopton to Philadelphia. In the "Butterfly" Tom expected to take only 3 hours. "Yes. I know, but we're going direct and it's only about two hundred and fifty miles." (6) The "about" may be a flimsy attempt at camouflage or it

may show the inaccuracies in the maps of that day. It is easily seen that a 250 mile arc from Philadelphia does not pass through any lake large enough to qualify as Carlopa except Lake George, and since, from other evidence, Shopton is definitely in central or western New York, Lake George has to be eliminated.

A 225 mile arc includes Oneida Lake and a 200 mile arc includes all of the Finger Lakes. Since it took the train over 5 hours it shows that Shopton was on a railroad line. Unfortunately "over" 5 hours is a bit indefinite. The Lackawanna railroad time table does little to help. Utica (the closest main station to Oneida Lake) to Philadelphia took over 10 hours which leads us to question whether Oneida Lake was intended as Lake Carlopa. Ithaca, at the end of Cayuga Lake, was 8 hours and 22 minutes from Philadelphia, also further than indicated. Of the remaining lakes large enough to fit the description of Lake Carlopa and which also had rail connections to Philadelphia, the one which seemed to be the best possibility was Keuka Lake. The village of Hammondsport has a rail connection to Bath, a few miles distant, (Mansburg?) and the running time from Bath to Philadelphia on No. 6, the Lackawanna Limited, was 8 hours and 38 minutes. It was also made clear in the book that Tom would have had to change cars since he states, "It's quite a little run from Shopton, because I can't get a through train." (7) It may be noted that no village in New York State, within a 250 mile radius of Philadelphia had a train schedule of less than 8 hours. The suspicion here is that Mr. Appleton was being cagey and deliberately increased the mileage and decreased the train time for his own purposes.

In an early adventure Tom was required to ride his motorcycle to Albany. It was to be a one day trip and he planned to eat lunch in Centreford and arrive in Albany before dark. (8) His dad's comment was, "Don't try to make speed, as there is no special rush." (9) Tom, in a dis-

cussion with Happy Harry, a vindictive tramp, told him the machine would do "two hundred miles a day, easily." (10) Even after he had been delayed by the tramp, he took time for a good dinner in Centreford, feeling no urgency. He did realize he would have to do some night riding, but it didn't bother him since . . . "the roads from now on are good. The highway leading to Albany was a hard, macadam one . . ." (11) This was in 1910 and the implication is clear that Tom had picked up either the old Cherry Valley Turnpike, now route 20, or the Utica-Albany road, now route 5. During the afternoon Tom came to grief when he was mugged in a church stable as he was waiting out a rain shower. He had just soliloquized that "if I get to Fordham by six o'clock I ought to be able to make Albany by nine, as it's only forty miles. I'll get supper in Fordham . . ." when he was knocked unconscious and carried to Dunkirk.

"Am I near Albany?" he asked when he regained consciousness.

"Albany? You're a good way from Albany," replied the farmer. "You're in the village of Dunkirk."

"How far is that from Centreford?"

"About seventy miles." (12)

In terms of 1910 a "good way" might be anything from 20 to 50 miles. Assuming that Dunkirk was on the way to Albany, which is indicated by internal evidence, Centreford to Albany might be 90 to 120 miles. Shopton to Centreford would seem to be a little less than half the total distance to Albany or about 80 miles. The total would be roughly 170 to 200 miles, which is in agreement with Tom's statement to Happy Harry. The author's personal experiences in riding a 1917 one cylinder Indian motorcycle some years ago leads him to believe that Tom was bragging a bit and that while he might do 200 miles a day over 1910 roads, he wouldn't do it easily.

Referring again to the map and examining the evidence, we note that Oneida Lake to Albany is about 125 miles or considerably less than our

figures. Hammondsport, on the other hand, is about 190 miles. Several other villages in the Finger Lakes region would also possibly qualify.

After Tom had failed miserably in his trip to Albany his father found it necessary to take the train there to salvage what he could. "I'll take the night train, Tom." (13) The next day, "He got a telegram from his father that afternoon, stating that Mr. Swift had safely arrived in Albany . . ." (14) If he had taken the #10 Lackawanna from Bath at 9:18 p.m. and changed at Binghamton to the Delaware and Hudson #305 he would have arrived in Albany at 11 50 a.m. The evidence accumulates.

We now have distances from 2 points and apparently have reduced the possibilities to the area of the Finger Lakes. Turning to **Tom Swift and His Big Dirigible** we find Tom occupied with vacation plans at Mt. Camon. "Wonderful hotel there, but in the middle of a great wilderness." (15) "Mt. Camon was the summit of a series of big hills, about two days' journey by automobile." (16) "The Mt. Camon Hotel was situated on a mountain top, girt around by immense forest stretches in every direction." (17) Mt. Camon must be in the Adirondacks, in northeastern New York. It is also close to a railroad. Mr. Damon comments, "The bus brought me here from that little jerk-water station shaped like a mushroom." Railroads were never over-plentiful in the north country but Lyon Mt. had both a railroad and the requisite wilderness. It fits the description almost exactly.

Meanwhile Tom was working on his dirigible, the "Silver Cloud." In trying it out around Shopton, New Newton commented, "You know the Moochie range of mountains lie south and there are some pretty tall peaks." This again points towards central New York. A few chapters later Tom had to run the "Silver Cloud" at full speed for about 2 hours to reach Camon Mt. The speed was at least 125 mph which would give 250 miles by air from Shopton to the resort hotel. By air the distance from Lyon

Mt. to Hammondsport is 230 miles.

When Tom was fetting ready for the big race in **Electric Runabout**, he commented, "It will be quite a trip to Long Island, and I think my best plan will be to go direct to the cottage we had when we were building the submarine and from there proceed to the track." (18) They had planned to spend two days and one night on the road, and did reach the shore cottage near Atlantis, New Jersey in 2 days. (19) The car was good for 100 mph but the roads were not, and in addition the batteries had to be charged. "He hoped to be able to make the entire distance to the shore cottage on the single charge." (20) Some juvenile delinquents had short-circuited the battery and Tom had to borrow juice from a trolley car line in order to make it to New Jersey. Since it took 2 days from Shopton to both Camon Mt. and to the New Jersey coast the supposition is that the distances should be similar. Examination of the map shows that from Hammondsport to Lyon Mt. and from Hammondsport to the New Jersey coast are indeed almost exactly the same.

The mind begins to boggle from the plethora of clues. We find Shopton was on a government airmail route. West of Shopton were open places with widely scattered cities. Shopton was an inland city. (21) They flew to Iceland in 3 days, steering north of east from Shopton. (22) Our general location is quite definitely determined. The remaining problem is to identify Lake Carlopa. This is doubly difficult since it changes in size periodically. At one time Tom discussed taking a week's tour of Carlopa by boat (23) and some time later in **Airline Express** is taken by a hidden tunnel from Shopton to the end of the lake. (24) Either someone did a lot of digging or the lake had dried up.

Again, let us examine the evidence. Mr. Damon "was traveling along a road that bordered the lake, about fifteen miles above here." (25) Keuka Lake measures about 20 miles in length. "Lake Carlopa was a large

body of water and it would take a moderately powered boat several days to make a complete circuit of the shore, so cut up into bays and inlets was it." (26) Keuka would certainly fit this description.

Several villages bordered Lake Carlopa, including Lanton, Sandport, Daleton and Waterfield. Urbana, Keuka, Catawba and Penn Yan could easily be the ones described.

Occasionally Mr. Appleton seems deliberately confusing. "The General Harkness mansion was 'away up at de head of Lake Carlopa,'" according to Eradicate. (27) "The Lake was a large one, and Tom had never been to the upper end." (28) Technically, the upper end of Keuka is the southern end since it flows north and since Shopton is near the southern end this description seems questionable. Then, however, Mr. Appleton gives away his deception by quoting Tom, "I'll circle around, and reach the mansion from the stretch of woods on the NORTH." (29) He later gives the game away completely when he notes "It was getting well on in the afternoon, and the sun was striking across the broad sheet of water. Tom glanced up along the shore . . ." "It was the chimney of a house . . ." "the sun striking full on the mysterious mansion . . ." (29) The Harkness Mansion was obviously at the north end and Shopton towards the south end of the lake.

Need we continue? Some may carp that Keuka is too small for the description. It is true that it took Tom about 7 hours to go from Sandport to Shopton in his boat the "Arrow," but the boat, which was 21 feet long with a 5½ foot beam, had only a 10 HP motor. A speed of 10 mph was claimed for it but this had to be under ideal conditions. (31) In addition, Tom had to stop for a burning balloon which took a few minutes.

Others may claim Keuka is too large. As noted earlier, in *Airline Express* Tom walked the length of a tunnel from the Swift Works and found himself on Barn Door Island. "The island was at the end of the lake farthest removed from Shopton

and the Swift plant." (32) A 20 mile tunnel is just too much, unless Tom himself had dug it which he hadn't. This occurs in volume 29 and it is apparent that by this time Mr. Appleton was deliberately throwing red herrings across the paths of future investigators.

The temptation exists to overwhelm the gentle reader with additional deductions. Further evidence, however, seems unnecessary. We could prove that a river ran through Shopton, that there was only one hotel in the village, that there was a trolley line and that Grandyke University was located nearby but this is unnecessary. Let us close by simply saying that we do not claim to have proved that Hammondsport, New York is the home of the vast Swift enterprises or that Keuka Lake is indeed Lake Carlopa. We offer the evidence only and let the reader make his own deductions.

Footnotes

1. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift Among the Fire Fighters," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1921, p. 9.
2. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Motor-Cycle," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1910, p. 9.
3. Appleton, Victor, II, "Tom Swift and His Sonic Boom Trap," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1965, pp. 8-9.
4. Hatch, Alden, "Glenn Curtiss," Julian Messner, New York, 1942, p. 63.
5. Donahey, John W., "Tom Swift and His Magic Typewriter," "Concept," Vol. 1, No. 1, 1963, p. 23.
6. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Wireless Message," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1911, p. 46.
7. Ibid., p. 10.
8. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Motor-Cycle," Op. Cit., p. 84.
9. Ibid., p. 85.
10. Ibid., p. 93.
11. Ibid., p. 106.
12. Ibid., p. 123.
13. Ibid., p. 144.
14. Ibid., p. 156.

15. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Big Dirigible," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1930, p. 6.
16. Ibid., p. 38.
17. Ibid., p. 75.
18. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Electric Runabout, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1910, p. 188.
19. Ibid., p. 201.
20. Ibid., p. 188.
21. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Great Oil Gusher," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1924, p. 12.
22. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Flying Boat," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1923, p. 135.
23. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Motor-Boat," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1910, p. 9.
24. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Airline Express," Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1926, p. 23.
25. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Motor-Boat," Op. Cit., p. 146.
26. Ibid., p. 10.
27. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Motor-Cycle," Op. Cit., p. 171.
28. Ibid., p. 176.
29. Ibid., p. 176.
30. Ibid., p. 178.
31. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Motor-Boat," Op. Cit., p. 15.
32. Appleton, Victor, "Tom Swift and His Airline Express," Op. Cit., p. 23.

F. W. DAVIS, 74, of 'NICK CARTER' AUTHORS, DEAD

(From a clipping sent in by Irene Gurman)

Helped Col. Dey Pen "Dime Novels": Created Harrison Keith Detective Series

New Bedford, Mass., Jan. 4 (1933) Frederick W. Davis, who was one of the authors of the "Nick Carter" stories died today. He was seventy-four years old.

Davis, who often wrote under the name of Scott Campbell, had lived in

New Bedford twenty-five years and wrote much of his popular fiction here. He was born in Barnstable, Mass., and was educated at the Chelsea High School, while his parents were residents of Chelsea.

Popular With Publishers

Frederick W. Davis was one of various writers who poured forth the Nick Carter series, the great majority of the stories having been written by the late Frederick van Rensselaer Dey. However, he was one of the most prolific writers of the detective stories of an older day. The Harrison Keith detective series was his own.

Widely known throughout New England, Mr. Davis is remembered by his publishers here, Street & Smith, as a delightful person who led so exemplary a life that there was little to be said about him.

"He was one of the men who never got into trouble of any kind," said Henry W. Ralston, of the publishing firm. "That's very unusual for an author. He was so quiet and gentle that he never had any escapades. He took the money he got for writing and applied it to his living expenses, which is a sensible thing to do, but that's a great deal more than one can say of most authors. He was a very lovable soul, as fine a gentleman as you'd want to meet."

Mr. Davis wrote detective stories for "The Boston Globe," under the name of Scott Campbell, for thirty years. Then the owner of the paper introduced him one day to Ormond Smith, of Street & Smith, and he began to write for the latter firm.

Until fifteen years ago he turned out the Harrison Keith stories. He wrote a "five-cent-weekly" for boys—a detective story published in pamphlet form—for some years, and he did what Mr. Ralston described as a "fine series" of detective stories for "Popular Magazine" when it was in its hey-day.

Helped On Nick Carter Series

He also did some of the Nick Carter series, but Mr. Ralston. Colonel Dey during his lifetime, and others, all agreed that 95 per cent of the Nick Carter stories were done by

Colonel Dey—that picturesque character who committed suicide ten years ago because he couldn't "stand the gaff," he said in a final note. Colonel Dey was accredited with 60,000,000 words about Nick Carter. (His title was one of those Kentucky-Colonel courtesy titles). But the combination of a 30,000-word Nick Carter story each week, with a 6,000-word installment of a serial proved too much for one man, and Dey called in other writers to help him. Mr. Davis wrote most of those done by others, according to Colonel Dey himself, but the late George Charles Jenks did some, Tozer did some, and there were other authors.

"Mr. Davis did some of the best detective stories I've ever read," said Mr. Ralston. "He was a craftsman, a darned good writer, and he did a much higher type of work than you would expect to find in periodicals of that sort."

Though he made his home in New England, Mr. Davis came to New York every month or so until fifteen years ago. Since then his publishers have seen nothing of him, though they would have been glad enough to take anything he wrote according to Mr. Ralston. He was in comfortable financial circumstances, and was "sensible" enough to retire as he found himself getting older, in the opinion of Street & Smith.

Mr. Davis lived in Chelsea, with a summer home in Onset, until the Chelsea home burned; then he moved to New Bedford. For many years he lived with his sister. Later he married. He was fond of boating, fishing and all sorts of quiet sports.

NOTES ON ONE OF GILBERT PATTEN'S LESS WELL KNOWN HARD COVER BOOKS

By Bob Chenu

One of Patten's less well known hard cover books is THE DEADWOOD TRAIL, which was copyrighted by D. Appleton and Company in 1904, and published September, 1904. It has 4 illustrations, by Will Crawford. The story runs 261 pages of text.

This is one instance wherein the book version publication of a story preceded a magazine serialization. The reverse is generally the case. The DEADWOOD TRAIL was serialized in TOP NOTCH MAGAZINE in 1910.

The first four chapters appeared Vol. 1 #1 March 1910. Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 appeared in Vol. 1 #2 as of April, Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 in Vol. 1 #3 of May 1910, Chapters 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 in #4 of June 1910, and Chapters 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 completed the story in Vol. 1 #5 in July 1910.

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JEFF CLAYTON—SEXTON BLAKE or, ANOTHER MYSTERY SOLVED

By J. Edward Leithead

Jeff Clayton, detective, solved many a dark mystery in the Arthur Westbrook Co.'s paperback book line. He was introduced as a detective trailing Jesse James in rewrites of the last two Jesse James stories from Log Cabin Library in the Adventure Series Nos. 42 and 43; then made his appearance in the titular role in Adventure Series No. 44, Jeff Clayton's Lost Clue, or, The Mystery of the Wireless Murder, by Wm. Ward (pseud.). But the biggest mystery of all was Jeff Clayton himself—were the stories about him new or reprints, with changes, from some older detective tales? For 34 issues of Adventure and possibly more (not an unbroken run, other stories were wedged in here and there), Jeff pursued his crime detecting career inherited from another sleuth as well-known as Nick Carter. Old King Brady and Sherlock Holmes. In fact, Nick, in New Magnet Library, had stood for many an issue in this same detective's shoes.

Not to prolong the suspense, I was looking through a copy of the large size Boys' Best Weekly. Jack Standfast Stories, No. 54, and came across a 3 page Jeff Clayton short story in the back pages: The Morehampton Mystery. How Jeff Clayton Bested a Bank BESTER. Maybe the last word is a misprint and should be Bank BUSTER, but, anyway, as I read on, encountering a character "Lord Milltown, chairman of the board of directors," the mention of London where the action was taking place, I began to wonder. On page 31 I read, "the detective (Jeff Clay-

ton) scribbled another note and handed it with a SHILLING to the CON-STABLE. (Note the British words.)

"Take that to the nearest telegraph office," he said, "and see that it is sent off at once."

"Mr. Penrose looked more puzzled than ever. But again the inspector's wits enabled him to guess the truth.

"Bloodhound?" he said.

"Yes," said Jeff Clayton. "I've wired to Tinker to send Pedro down by the next train."

Pedro—none other than Sexton Blake, the famous English detective's bloodhound (Nick Carter owned a bloodhound of the same name).

And Tinker—faithful assistant of Sexton Blake, particularly in the earliest Sexton Blake tales.

So, I have no doubt the whole series of Jeff Clayton titles published by Westbrook can be traced to Blake and his numerous authors. But we might still be thinking Jeff an original character in dime novels if some proof reader hadn't slipped up by linking him with Tinker. Blake's first assistant, and Pedro, the dog who tracked 'em down.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES CONCERNING DIME NOVELS

COLLECTOR'S WORLD. January-February 1970. Collector's World Pub. Co., 3201 N. Frazier St., Conroe, Tex. 77301. AMERICAN HISTORY IN OLD TIME BOYS' BOOKS, by J. Edward Leithead. An excellently written article about the boys' books of the 19th century that featured themes in American history. Ellis, Castlemon, Stratemeyer and many others are discussed. Price \$1.00. Well illustrated.

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- 506. John Nieminski, 2948 Western, Park Forest, Ill. 60466 (New member)
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